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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 005831

SIPDIS

FROM FODAG

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: FODAG AMBASSADOR CONVEYS U.S. MESSAGE ON FOOD AID AND FAMINE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

REF: STATE 239750 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR TONY HALL, U.S. MISSION ROME, PRESENTED U.S. VIEWS ON THE GROWING HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA ON DECEMBER 2 TO SELECTED ROME-BASED PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES. AMBASSADOR NICHOLSON, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE HOLY SEE ALSO PARTICIPATED. EU AND AFRICAN REPRESENTATIVES WELCOMED THE U.S. INITIATIVE; A CONSENSUS ON THE GROWING URGENCY OF THE SITUATION WAS ALSO EVIDENT. THE ZIMBABWE REPRESENTATIVE, SPEAKING FOR THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN SUB-REGION, EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR DONORS' CONCERN AND ASSISTANCE. PARTICIPANTS DID NOT COMMENT DIRECTLY ON THE AMBASSADOR'S REQUEST FOR COUNTRIES TO SPEAK OUT ON THE SAFETY OF U.S. FOOD AID OTHER THAN THE EC REPRESENTATIVE'S AFFIRMATION OF 1) THE SAFETY OF THE FOOD AID IN QUESTION BUT 2) THE RIGHT OF COUNTRIES TO CHOOSE TO ACCEPT OR NOT, BASED ON THE "PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE." END SUMMARY.

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2. AMBASSADOR TONY HALL CONVENED SELECTED ROME-BASED PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES TO THE FAO ON DECEMBER 2, 2002 TO DISCUSS FOOD AID TO COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY DROUGHT IN THE SUB REGION (REFTEL). ALL EU MEMBERS, PLUS JAPAN, CANADA, AUSTRALIA AND HEADS OF OTHER FAO REGIONAL GROUPS WERE INVITED AS WELL AS THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY THE DROUGHT (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ZAMBIA, WHICH IS NOT REPRESENTED IN ROME). OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES, ONLY ZIMBABWE AND SOUTH AFRICA ATTENDED. AMBASSADOR HALL BRIEFED PARTICIPANTS USING THE TALKING POINTS IN REFTEL AND DISTRIBUTED WRITTEN COPIES OF THE U.S. POSITION FOLLOWING THE MEETING. AMBASSADOR NICHOLSON, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE HOLY SEE, PARTICIPATED AS WELL, USING THE OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS THE RECENT FOCUS OF EMBASSY VATICAN IN ATTEMPTING TO HAVE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH PLAY A MORE POSITIVE ROLE IN THE GM FOOD AID DEBATE, NOTING IN PARTICULAR HIS CONCERN ABOUT THE JESUIT COMMUNITY IN ZAMBIA BEING ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THIS ISSUE.

3. EUROPEAN AND AFRICAN COLLEAGUES WELCOMED THE U.S. INITIATIVE (UNUSUAL BETWEEN REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETINGS OF ROME-BASED UN AGENCIES). DONORS EXPRESSED GROWING CONCERN WITH THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. DENMARK, SPEAKING AS THE EU PRESIDENT, CALLED FOR GREATER DONOR COORDINATION, GUIDELINES TO GOVERN DISTRIBUTION IN ZIMBABWE, PLANNING FOR REHABILITATION OF COUNTRIES FOLLOWING THE CURRENT CRISIS, AND THE NEED FOR HARMONIZED REGIONAL GUIDELINES ON GM COMMODITIES. THE EC PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE (COMMENT: THE EC IS A FAO MEMBER. END COMMENT) STATED THAT THE EC HAD ALREADY PROVIDED 250 MILLION EUROS TO THE SIX AFFECTED COUNTRIES OF THE SUB REGION. SHE

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SAID THAT FIGURE INCREASED TO 328 MILLION EUROS WHEN CONTRIBUTIONS FROM INDIVIDUAL MEMBER COUNTRIES WERE INCLUDED. (COMMENT: FODAG CAN VERIFY USD 60 MILLION IN FOOD AID FROM EC-EUROPAID AND USD 314,651 FROM EC-ECHO THROUGH WFP AND CONTRIBUTIONS FROM INDIVIDUAL EU MEMBER STATES TO WFP AMOUNTING TO ANOTHER USD 57.41 MILLION. END COMMENT.)

4. THE MAJOR DIFFERENCE IN VIEWS CONCERNED BIOTECH FOOD AID. AMBASSADOR HALL CITED THE U.S. EXPERIENCE, NOTING THERE HAD BEEN NO ILL EFFECTS ON MILLIONS OF AMERICANS WHO HAVE EATEN BIOTECH FOOD FOR YEARS, AND THE URGENT NEED TO GET U.S. AID TO THOSE WHO ARE LIKELY TO STARVE IF NOT PROVIDED FOOD. THE EC PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE REAFFIRMED THE EC COMMISSIONER'S STATEMENT THAT THERE WERE NO HEALTH PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH U.S.-APPROVED GM MAIZE VARIETIES, BUT UNDERLINED THAT DEVELOPING COUNTRIES COULD ADOPT WHATEVER LEGISLATION THEY SAW FIT, BASED ON THE "PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE."

5. THE AMBASSADOR OF ZIMBABWE NOTED THAT ZIMBABWE HAD A BIOSAFETY COUNCIL, AS A RESULT OF WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN ABLE TO ASSESS THE PROPERTIES AND SAFETY OF THE FOOD AID IN QUESTION. THEY HAD CONCLUDED THAT IT COULD BE DISTRIBUTED AS MILLED MEAL. SHE ADDED THAT ZIMBABWE'S

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ACTION EUR-00

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| INFO | LOG-00 | NP-00 | AF-00 | AID-00 | CEA-01 | CIAE-00 | CTME-00 |
| | USNW-00 | DODE-00 | ITCE-00 | WHA-00 | SRPP-00 | EAP-00 | EB-00 |
| | EXME-00 | OIGO-00 | E-00 | UTED-00 | FDRE-01 | VC-00 | FRB-00 |
| | HHS-01 | H-01 | TEDE-00 | INR-00 | IO-00 | ITC-01 | L-00 |
| | VCE-00 | AC-01 | NEA-00 | NSAE-00 | NSCE-00 | OES-00 | OIC-02 |
| | OMB-01 | OPIC-01 | PER-00 | ACE-00 | SP-00 | SSO-00 | STR-00 |
| | TEST-00 | TRSE-00 | USIE-00 | SA-00 | PRM-00 | DRL-02 | G-00 |
| | NFAT-00 | SAS-00 | SWCI-00 | /012W | | | |

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R 031426Z DEC 02
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7182
INFO USDA FAS WASHDC 2455
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY HARARE
AMEMBASSY LILONGWE
AMEMBASSY LUANDA
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY MASERU
AMEMBASSY MBABANE
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

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AND FAMINE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

DECISION WAS BASED ON THE "NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE." GM MAIZE WAS "NOT THEIR FIRST CHOICE" BUT THEY "HAD TO MAKE DO WITH WHAT WAS AVAILABLE." FOR COUNTRIES IN THE REGION THAT DO NOT HAVE BIOSAFETY COUNCILS IN PLACE, SHE STRESSED THE NEED FOR DONOR ASSISTANCE IN HELPING THEM BUILD UP THEIR NATIONAL CAPACITY IN THIS REGARD. SHE ADDED THAT IN THE LONGER TERM, SADC EXPERTS HAVE DISCUSSED WORKING ON A REGION-WIDE POLICY ON GMO'S. THE AMBASSADOR OF ZIMBABWE NOTED THAT THERE HAD BEEN PROBLEMS IN SOME PLACES WHERE THE GOVERNMENT WAS LETTING "TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP" HANDLE FOOD DISTRIBUTION. SHE STATED THAT THEY WERE GETTING FEEDBACK FROM AND LEARNING FROM DONORS ON PROBLEMS IN THIS AREA. SHE WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE MAJOR CHALLENGE WAS FOR FARMERS TO ACCESS INPUTS FOR THE NEXT SEASON (PLANTING FOR WHICH HAD ALREADY BEGUN).

16. THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR STATED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WAS "SENSITIVE TO THE ISSUE OF BIOTECH FOOD AID," DESPITE "DIVERGING VIEWS IN OUR COUNTRY ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY" AND AFFIRMED THAT AFRICA WAS A HIGH PRIORITY FOR THE

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GOVERNMENT OF ITALY. THE CANADIAN REPRESENTATIVE ASKED SPECIFICALLY IF ZIMBABWE COULD NOT IMPROVE ACCESS TO FOOD IN THE REGION BY LIFTING THE GRAIN BOARD'S MONOPOLY (AS HAD BEEN DONE FOR FUEL.) THE ZIMBABWE REPRESENTATIVE REPLIED THAT HER GOVERNMENT WAS CONSULTING WITH DONORS AND WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR ON SUCH ISSUES.

17. COMMENT - THIS INITIATIVE WAS MUCH APPRECIATED. U.S. MISSION WOULD RECOMMEND IN FAVOR OF CONDUCTING SIMILAR BRIEFINGS ON CRISES IN THE FUTURE. END COMMENT.

HALL

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